

Volunteers at the Heart of the Provincial Emergency Program

A group of children and their leaders are missing. A call is made by police to the Province's 24-hour Emergency Coordination Centre in Victoria. From there, an operations officer locates local emergency response contacts who call out volunteers as ground search crews and air and radio support teams. The search is on.

It's an efficient system, coordinated by the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General, Provincial Emergency Program (PEP). The key aim is to help local communities develop and maintain emergency response teams.

Volunteers are at the heart of the emergency program's success. There are more than 13,000 volunteers across the province. They do everything from leading ground searches and helping the victims of serious car accidents to setting up networks of volunteer teams and coordinating emergency social services.

Volunteers are men and women from all walks of life, spanning generations. In B.C., municipalities and regional districts are responsible for planning and operating local emergency programs and operations. In the case of major disasters—such as interface fires or flooding or a powerful earthquake—the province supports local governments and coordinates provincial resources.

Bob Bugslag, Director of the Provincial Emergency Program says, "PEP is the provincial coordinating body, providing support to volunteers so they can look after their communities."

PEP provides benefits that help people perform emergency volunteer work. All volunteers are registered in a central data base. They are provided with Worker's Compensation coverage and liability insurance. PEP funds basic training and also replaces lost or damaged equipment used by volunteers in their call-outs, and reimburses volunteers for other related expenses.

PEP volunteers contribute in five main program areas:

- **PEP Air** conducts air searches and supports ground search and rescue missions.
- **Search and Rescue** tracks lost hikers, campers and skiers, and provides them with necessary emergency support including first aid and transportation
- **Emergency Social Services** provides food, lodging, clothing and emotional support for disaster victims.
- **Emergency Radio Communications** provides emergency communication services for remote areas, along with local, regional and provincial emergency links.
- **Highway Rescue** provides essential life saving tools—such as the jaws of life—for highway accident victims.

To recognize the critical role of volunteers, PEP hosts an annual volunteer awards dinner in Victoria to kick off Emergency Preparedness Week. Volunteers from each program are recognized for their special contribution to the people of British Columbia.

Bugslag says, "It's a privilege to honour emergency volunteers from every corner of B.C. These people donate their time and energy to protect the health and well-being of others. Their community spirit, dedication and commitment to helping others keep our province strong. They are truly B.C.'s public safety lifeline."

Those interested in learning more about volunteer opportunities can contact any of the six regional PEP offices. A complete list of offices is available at www.pep.bc.ca